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SUBJECT: NINEWA ON THE EVE OF ELECTIONS: COUNTERING
THREATS TO THE SECURITY AND INTEGRITY OF THE PROCESS AND
PROMOTING THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS

Classified By: Acting Deputy Chief of Mission. Robert S. Ford.
Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

This is a joint PRT, MND-N and 3-1 Cav message.

11. (S) Summary: Credible provincial elections are key to creating the conditions for sustainable political and economic development in Ninewa Province. They are also critical to the resolution of the disputed internal boundaries (DIBs) issue as well as to Arab-Kurd relations within Ninewa and across the provincial border. Along with local elections later in the year, they will help determine the future course of minority communities. Finally, they are vital for turning the remarkable but temporary security gains of CF and their ISF partners into lasting Iraqi-led stability in Ninewa. If the January 31 provincial election in Ninewa is regarded as legitimate and credible, recent security gains can be consolidated into lasting political, economic and essential service upgrades. An election result accepted by all parties can help further isolate civilians from the insurgency, decrease pressure on vulnerable minority communities, and expand the space for political compromise on sensitive issues like the DIBs areas. MND-N, 3-1 Cav and PRT Mosul are working together on a security plan for polling sites, investigating allegations of pre-election voter intimidation, and warning all parties against attempts at vote manipulation. On election day, PRT will deploy 11 observer teams to cover 19 of the province's most politically sensitive sub-districts. MND-N is facilitating Iraqi movement of ballots and other polling material and the distribution of voter education material. Without credible public opinion polling, or even broadly accepted demographic information, forecasting a winner is impossible. The key questions are who speaks for the Sunni Arab majority, and will the Kurdish list be integrated into a future governing coalition. End summary.

12. (S) To help ensure a process that the people of Ninewa regard as credible and legitimate, we are taking the following measures:

-- While the ISF, in cooperation with the Peshmerga and other sub-national security forces, is charged with leading security planning in the region, MND-N has played the vital role of identifying significant deficiencies and providing substantial logistical and strategic guidance. What has emerged is a joint GOI-CF security plan in most of the province, but also a tripartite mechanism for areas of Ninewa where there is the possibility of statistically or politically-relevant interference. Most of these areas lie in parts of Ninewa under the de facto control of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and reflect Sunni Arab (and USG) concerns that widespread fraud in these areas in 2005 could be repeated.

-- ISF (IA & IPs) and CF will secure the 690 polling sites throughout the province on a two-ring model. The inner ring

will be elements of national and local police only; the second ring will be Iraqi army in areas under Mosul/Baghdad control. The disputed areas will have the same arrangements, except a negotiated percentage of Peshmerga forces will also assist with the second ring at the 210 disputed sites identified in areas under de facto KRG control. (Note: The latter group of sites include most Christian, Yezidi and Shebak communities in the province; the exception is the Tal Afari Turkmen community.) The IA and Peshmerga have also negotiated five joint checkpoints to secure the provincial borders. Additionally, CF will be visible and present as they rotate through the 210 disputed area polling sites. CF will be less visible and mostly providing a Quick Reaction Force (QRF) at the non-disputed sites in the rest of Ninewa.

-- As part of the security plan, Ninewa's borders (including with Syria), will be closed on election day. Registered IDPs will vote at IHEC centers in Irbil, Dahuk, and Suleimaniya; unregistered IDPs will not be able to vote.

-- The PRT is deploying 11 observation teams to 19 sub-districts, integrating the United Nations and international media. Those teams will be moved by CF. Civilian security agents, traveling with observation teams, will be authorized to enter polling centers. (Note: Polling Centers are off-limits to all armed personnel, including CF and Iraqi military, except for credentialed personal security details for international observer teams. End Note).

-- The PRT and BCT are facilitating the arrival and dispatch of voting materials into and from Mosul Airport. Note:

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Mosul Airport is located on FOB Diamondback but is under Iraqi control and guarded by a UK company - Sabre -- under contract to the Iraqi Civil Aviation Authority (ICAA). Materials are always under the armed protection of Sabre guards, including when being off-loaded by US contractor forklifts and on to IHEC-chartered trucks.

-- All elections material move under armed ISF escort, with CF over-watch on the ground and in the air. Material will move from Mosul Airport to ISF COP Lion/Courage for storage until it is moved to three warehouses, then to 55 voter registration centers, then out to the polling venues. After votes are counted on site, the process will reverse itself back to Mosul airport, always under ISF security with CF over-watch.

-- MND-N and PRT met with International Republican Institute (IRI) officials in Irbil. IRI is printing 250,000 voter education pamphlets that have been promised to be delivered to Mosul no later than January 21. Those materials will be turned over to the ISF's Ninewa Operations Command for distribution by Iraqi army and police units throughout the province. IRI also promised voter education public service announcements that we will place on Al Mosulia TV and other stations with Ninewa viewership, as well as a 90-minute national town hall program that we will ask Iraqi stations to air.

-- CF and PRT are in regular contact with the Ninewa Government Electoral Officer (GEO), Abdel Haleq Dabbagh. When Abdel Haleq reported threats to himself and his family, MND-N intervened with the NOC to get him an ISF personal security detail (PSD).

-- We have all intensified our engagements with political leaders throughout the province. We have met with most of the 31 registered parties, but have focused on the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP), Al-Hudba Gathering, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), and parties representing Christian, Yezidi, Shebak and Turkman communities.

-- We have investigated claims of intimidation or other forms of harassment and raised our concerns directly with KDP Vice Governor Keshro Goran and KDP Sinjar leader Serbast Terwanishi.

-- PRT's public diplomacy section did 10 days of training for 65 Iraqi journalists. Using trainers from George Washington University, we focused on the mechanics of elections coverage.

-- Using the QRF mechanism, we have provided five grants to four NGOs, with a focus on voter education in minority areas.

Election Day and the results

¶3. (S) Up to 1.6 million registered voters will vote in an open-list system for parties and/or candidates for Ninewa's 37-seat Provincial Council. Once elected, the new provincial council will elect the new Council Chair, Governor and Vice Governor. Each position requires a two-thirds majority. The Council is not required to select the Governor and Vice Governor from their membership. Thirty-one political entities are contesting the election. The political entities vary in size from one to 34 candidates. There are minority candidates contesting the quota seats as well as appearing on party lists.

¶4. (S) Under the provisions of 2008's electoral law, seats are awarded to lists with the most votes, but in greater proportion than popular vote alone would indicate. The magnitude of this effect is difficult to predict due to the complex nature of the allocation steps used in the award process and the large number of contesting lists; however, the process and the large number of contesting lists; however, the fact that the award mechanisms favor the largest lists may have a significant effect on the final balance of power in the Ninewa provincial council, including through disadvantaging of minority parties.

¶5. (S) The GEO has done a good job in placing polling venues in such a way that voters will not have to cross into other communities to cast their ballots. Ninewa had the highest rates of voter registration in Iraq, and only those registered will be handed a ballot paper. The Irbil GEO told us that there are 64,000 registered IDPs in the three KRG governorates, and they come from all over Iraq and are a mix of Kurds, Arabs, Christians and others. Local KDP officials, led by Vice Governor Keshro Goran, have called for a

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postponement of the elections in order to allow voting by what he says are 120,000 Kurdish IDPs from pre- and post-Saddam era caseloads. The Irbil GEO estimates this group as numbering 13,000 families, and confirms there are no provisions for them to vote in this election if they failed to register for the vote in Ninewa during the registration period.

¶6. (S) Sunni Arab parties, as well as minority parties opposed to the KRG, have repeatedly raised concerns that the KDP, the Peshmerga and the Asa'ash (KRG secret police) will intimidate voters on election day, including through local police on duty closest to polling venues. (Comment: Local police in Mosul city and in the southern part of the province are overwhelmingly Sunni Arab, however, so at most this allegation would pertain to Kurdish-speaking or Kurdish-controlled areas. End comment.) They have demanded that Iraqi National police (majority Shia Arab) from outside Ninewa staff the polling venues. Instead, there will be a mix of local police and Emergency Response Battalion (ERB) units; the latter have a mixed composition but are majority Arab. The two main Sunni Arab parties told us that they have 6,000 party observers ready to deploy, and between the UN and NDI, another 20,000 civil society observers have been trained countrywide.

Who is going to win?

17. (S) Bearing in mind Yogi Berra's maxim that it is difficult to make predictions, especially about the future, we are not handicapping this race. We suspect that it will be a de facto ethnic census, but given the lack of reliable demographic data, we will not even speculate on that basis. Nevertheless, the following are the key questions that we have going into the elections:

-- Will any party be able to claim the mantle of Sunni Arab leadership in Ninewa? Al Hudba and IIP already claim it, but given the January 2005 Sunni Arab boycott (which the IIP defied at great cost over the last four years), the proposition has never been put to the test.

-- Will any single Sunni Arab party be able to govern on its own, or will two or more Sunni Arab-based parties be able to govern in coalition?

-- If provincial power requires coalition with non-Sunni Arab parties, will those parties come from the Kurdish list or minority parties opposed to the KRG?

-- Will parties with unrealistic expectations of their support (most, if not all of them) be so disgruntled that they turn away from the political process?

What's at stake?

18. (S) CF and ISF have lowered the rates of violence in Ninewa by 75 percent over the last year, but it is testament to conditions in the province that despite this remarkable progress against the insurgency, Ninewa remains the most violent province in Iraq. This reduction has taken place in a political vacuum; there has been no provincial political settlement on which to base counter-insurgency strategies and the governing institutions of the province are widely viewed as illegitimate. (They certainly are not representative of Ninewa's political demography.) Progress against AQI/ISI and other terrorist groups has also taken place in a development vacuum; due in part to catastrophic drought over the past four years, the economy of Ninewa has contracted at a time when other provinces in Iraq experienced some growth.

19. (S) Elections are necessary but insufficient to political and economic development to the province. Seating a Provincial Council that represents the population is a necessary first step. The outgoing Council has 31 of 41 seats held by the KDP and others on the Kurdish list. The Council and Governor Duraid Kashmoula (a Sunni Arab with strong pro-Kurdish views) have failed to deliver services to the population and are broadly reviled outside Kurdish-dominated areas. The progress over one year of the Ninewa Operations Command (NOC) from six retired officers in civilian clothes to an effective Corps-level organization controlling 74,000 ISF personnel has not been matched by a commensurate political development.

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10. (S) The transition zone between Arab and Kurdish Iraq runs through northern and eastern Ninewa, a region inhabited by a rich mosaic of linguistic and religious minorities, including Christians of multiple denominations, Yezidi, Shebak and Turkmen. All are being instrumentalized by political parties (Arab, Kurdish and their own), and all face threats from insurgents. With the exception of the Tal Afari Turkmen, most enjoy the superior security found in areas under de facto KRG control, although most split on the

question of identification with the KRG or Arab-majority Ninewa. Most of these areas lie within parts of the province that are subject to the UNAMI-led process to determine the status of disputed internal boundaries (DIBs). If the provincial elections process is legitimate and credible, the results should be our first quantitative indicators of local sentiment regarding minority views on DIBs, although the subsequent district and sub-district elections will provide more fine-grained data.

¶11. (S) One of the animating issues in the campaign has been the presence of Kurdish security forces in Ninewa, including IA units with Kurdish personnel, Peshmerga forces, and members of the Asa'ash. The presence of these units within Ninewa poses a dilemma for us: on one hand they provide security for minority communities that would be difficult to replicate in the near term. On the other hand, their checkpoints and the perception that Kurdish-dominated IA units are loyal to Irbil rather than Baghdad - coupled with the broad perception of a US-KRG alliance - is a contributing factor in the insurgency's staying power. There is a strong element of anti-Kurd propaganda in the campaign. Although Sunni Arab leaders tell us that they are criticizing the KDP and not "our brothers the Kurds" they are dissembling. Should Al Hudba emerge as the governing party or senior coalition partner, Arab-Kurd relations in the province will likely degrade further.

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